

Department of History, Arts and Libraries  
Office of Cultural Economic Development  
**IDLEWILD, MICHIGAN TRANSFORMATION INITIATIVE UPDATE**  
April 30, 2008

*"People have to feel needed. Frequently, we just offer a job and 'perks.' We don't always offer people a purpose. When people feel there is a purpose and that they're needed, there's not much else to do except let them do the work."*  
Maya Angelou, Novelist and Poet (1928 - )

The *Idlewild, Michigan Transformation Initiative* is a partnership initiative established by Governor Jennifer M. Granholm in 2007 to "create jobs, build a thriving community and ensure a bright future for Idlewild". It is anticipated that the initiative will also prove beneficial to the Lake County region as a whole. The initiative is collaboratively led by the Department of History, Arts and Libraries, Michigan Economic Development Corporation and representatives of Yates Township and Idlewild, Michigan.

Idlewild, Michigan, founded in 1912, is a cultural icon. At approximately 3,000 acres, it is the largest land-based historically African-American resort ever assembled in the United States. The beauty of its idyllic setting in the Manistee National Forest and spring fed lakes are world renown. Once a regional economic engine, cultural nexus and major recreation and entertainment destination, Idlewild has struggled since the 1960's with declining population, businesses, cottage ownership and tourism. However, there is good reason to believe Idlewild can recover and transform itself based on its proud legacy to once again become a thriving and dynamic community. A national team of historic preservationists, architects, landscape architects and planners affirmed this in a 2006 report to the State of Michigan stating, "Idlewild is a national treasure, and possesses the physical resources, history, authenticity and broad culture to achieve great success with economic development via cultural tourism." Moreover, Idlewild/Yates Township is the home and summer residence of hundreds of talented, hard working and committed citizens.

The *Idlewild, Michigan Transformation Initiative* focuses on engaging federal, state and local government and non-government agencies as resource partners to assist the Idlewild community creatively and strategically use its unique assets (i.e., talent, culture, history, and built and natural environments) to grow cultural tourism, spur related economic development and improve quality of life. Making the best use of these resources and assets by the Idlewild community requires readiness and capacity, so a considerable amount of the work of the Initiative over the last year and a half has involved helping the community to:

- become more unified
- prepare for new visitors, jobs, businesses and property owners
- seek new strategies to improve daily living

Grounded in community-identified priorities, the work has specifically targeted these key critical issues:

- blight removal
- community capacity building
- cultural revitalization
- historic preservation
- strategic planning
- economic development

While much has been accomplished, much remains to be done in the coming months and years, toward achievement of the community's vision for Idlewild by 2012, its centennial year.

Accomplishments to Date:

2007:

- National Resource Team provided a comprehensive report on Idlewild, Michigan
- *Positive Image*, a community action group, was established
- A clean-up of state-owned sites in Lake County was conducted
- Past issues related to Michigan Department of Natural (DNR) Resources grants were resolved
- Idlewild Lake/Williams Island skid pier/ boat launch was repaired by the DNR
- *The Pride*, a community online newsletter, was established
- The Idlewild community's first community strategic visioning meeting was convened
- Governor Jennifer M. Granholm visited Idlewild and announced \$93,875 in combined federal and state grants in support of historic preservation activities
- The Yates Township Board adopted an *Idlewild Vision Statement for 2012*
- The *Idlewild Jazz Festival* received \$6,800 from the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs
- Idlewild's US 10 entrance was improved, through the generous efforts of local citizens, and commemorated by an official flag raising event
- Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) awarded \$25,000 to Yates Township to support environmental assessment and blight removal
- Yates Township Planning and Zoning Commission crafted a new economic development vision for Idlewild
- MEDC and MDOT awarded \$44,000 to Yates Township to support development of a comprehensive transportation vision and economic development action strategy
- Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs awarded to Yates Township \$11,000 to support development of a youth music camp and \$24,000 to support development of the *Idlewild, Michigan Oral History Project*
- The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund board awarded a \$324,900 grant to the DNR's Parks and Recreation Division for the development of a public park with a handicapped accessible fishing dock and carry down boat launch located on the southeast shoreline of Lake Idlewild on existing state property
- Governor Jennifer M. Granholm established the Idlewild Centennial Commission
- Historic Preservation Consultant, Community Resources Group (CRG), hired with funding from a Preserve America grant to the State historic Preservation Office (SHPO)

2008:

- Governor Jennifer M. Granholm appointed 21 members to the Idlewild Centennial Commission
- The Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) awarded a grant of \$500,000 for blight removal
- US 10 Road Improvements Project near Idlewild Broadway Entrance announced
- Economic Development Consultant, JacobsenDaniels, LLC, hired with funding from the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC)
- *Camp Idlewild of Michigan* was established and accepted into the *2008 Summer Dreams Program*, a program of the Skillman Foundation and the *Detroit Free Press*

- The Idlewild Ministerial Alliance was established through the collaborative efforts of local clergy and the Governor's Office of Community and Faith-Based Initiatives
- Idlewild, Michigan beautification initiative announced; a collaboration between Yates Township, Michigan Department of Corrections, Positive Image, Mid-Michigan Idlewilders and local citizens
- The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has selected five (5) Idlewild sites that will receive State of Michigan Historical Markers paid for by a federal grant. A proposal is under consideration to install several more markers in recognition of historic Idlewild churches.
- Nearly 200 volunteers were recruited from *Idlewild, Michigan Transformation Initiative* presentations to members of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority and the *Governor's Clergy Leadership Advisory Council*
- The Idlewild Public Library was approved to receive designation as a national literary landmark

#### Idlewild, Michigan Transformation Initiative Partners:

*Idlewild, Michigan Transformation Initiative* partners include Yates Township, Michigan Department of Corrections, Department of History, Arts and Libraries (HAL), Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Office of Cultural Economic Development, Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs (MCACA), Idlewild African American Chamber of Commerce, Library of Michigan, Idlewild Citizens, State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), Michigan Legislative Black Caucus Foundation, Enterprise Community Board, Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA), Department of Labor and Economic Growth (DLEG), National Trust for Historic Preservation, Office of Congresswoman Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick, Office of the Governor (Lansing/D.C.), Office of Congressman John Conyers, Positive Image (Group), State Representative Geoff Hansen, Travel Michigan, National Parks Service, National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), United States Department of Agriculture – USDA Rural Development, United States Forest Service, University of Michigan Dearborn, Wayne State University, and consultants: Community Resources Group (Jackson, MI) and JacobsenDaniels and Associates, LLC (Ypsilanti)

#### For More Information:

For more information about the *Idlewild, Michigan Transformation Initiative*, cultural economic development, and a schedule of related meetings and events, log on to [www.michigan.gov/idelwild](http://www.michigan.gov/idelwild) or contact the HAL Office of Cultural Economic Development at [www.michigan.gov/ced](http://www.michigan.gov/ced) or call 517/241-3973 or e-mail Betty Boone, Director, Office of Cultural Economic Development, Department of History, Arts and Libraries at [bboone@michigan.gov](mailto:bboone@michigan.gov)

